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cultural bonding through the arts

Andrew Hassard
Director of Parks & Leisure
Parks & Leisure Department
Belfast City Council
Cecil Ward Building
4-10 Linenhall Street
Belfast
BT2 8PB

15th February 2011

Dear Andrew,

Re: Updates on Development of Belfast Mela 2011

I refer to my previous letter dated 1st September 2009 outlining a request for the use of Botanic Gardens from 24th-30th August 2011 (inclusive of build and de-rig) to hold the Belfast Mela 2011 which will be delivered to the public on the 28th August 2011 from 12pm-8.30pm. Currently, we have not received any acceptance or declination of this request, and would appreciate a response in order to secure plans for the delivery of the festival.

The Belfast Mela (Mela meaning 'to meet') is Northern Ireland's largest multi-cultural festival and has developed into a quality cultural product for Botanic Gardens increasing accessibility to the park on a local, regional and national basis. Over four years, the Mela has attracted almost 40,000 visitors and developed a shared, inclusive and culturally rich space that connects minority ethnic and local indigenous communities. The festival links very closely with the council's Integrated Cultural Strategy, Good Relations Plan and Cultural Tourism Strategy. As the Mela has grown it has been able to deliver more broadly on culture, arts, tourism and economic objectives, through encouraging interconnections between 10s of 1000s of people raising cultural awareness, encouraging civic identity and promoting a positive image for Northern Ireland, based on the values of inclusivity, diversity and openness, and through use of natural assets.

ArtsEkta were recently made aware of funding to the value of £14,500.00 that was provided to Queens Festival to develop a concept similar to the council's 'Enchanted Evenings'. Several of our key funding streams have not been agreed for 2011, the most notable being the council's good relations Peace III scheme which is not being facilitated until late summer. This fund represents a significant proportion of our



belfast
mela

ArtsEkta are the
proud organisers
of the Belfast Mela

budget. To this end, I would appreciate if you could outline if a similar level of funding is available from the parks and leisure department, and if so, how to access it. Please find enclosed an evaluation report from last year which will offer more detailed information about the festival if funding is available.

In addition, to continue the festival at its current scale and after careful deliberation we have highlighted the possible need for charging a nominal admission fee of £1 for adults and free admission for children. Whilst every effort has been made to maintain free admission to the event, it is no longer financially feasible, as we feel it will damage the quality and reputation of this leading cultural festival through cuts in budget. I would kindly ask you to request permission from the committee to charge admission for the festival and what steps need to be taken to ensure no conflict with council policy.

May I take this opportunity to thank the department for their continued support of the Mela, and more recently our Diwali & Samhain festival, which was a major success attracting over 7,000 people. The support we have received has helped events such as the Mela become what they are today and has built our confidence to continually innovate and bring unique cultural experiences to our country.

Yours Sincerely,



Nisha Tandon
Director

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Encs

CC: Alex McNeill, Park Manager, Botanic Gardens